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(54) A name service for a redundant array of internet servers

(57) A self-reconfiguring name service that distributes workload among the available servers in a system. A Service Monitor for each host system of a site periodically broadcasts information about available servers. The broadcast message also indicates the workload of the host. Each name service (DNS) has an associated process called a Name Binder Modifier that receives the broadcast messages from the Service Monitors. Periodically, each Name Binder Modifier reviews the information it has received from various Service Monitors and updates zones that are used by the DNS to perform load balancing. The Service Monitor and the Name Binding Modifier have associated configuration files.

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Description

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This application relates to distributed computing using the client/server model and, more specifically, to an improved name service for a client/server system.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In recent years, the internet has become extremely popular. Using the internet, a group of users in widely scattered locations can retrieve information located at a centralized site. The site, which may offer one or more "services" (also called "resources"), is connected to the internet through a high speed connection. A user can access the site via the internet to read electronic mail, read news via Usenet, or view World Wide Web pages. As the speed of the connections between the user and the site improves, more users will be attempting to access the site's resources at a given time.

Internet services in a site are accessed via the servers of the site. Multiple servers can provide access to a single service. Similarly, a single server can provide access to multiple services.

Resources on the internet are accessed via names. A resource name typically contains multiple name components. The first name component is a domain name. This domain name typically refers to one or more hosts and conventionally is resolved through the Domain Name Service (DNS) of the site. An implicit or explicit second name component identifies the communications endpoint or server that will be used to access the resource on a particular host. The remaining name components are processed by the identified server to access the specified resource on the located host.

For example, a WWW hypertext document is named by a Uniform Resource Locator (URL), such as: <http://www.sun.com/welcome.html>.

To access this document, the domain name component, www.sun.com, is first resolved to locate a host. Then, the hypertext transfer protocol (http) name component identifies a communications endpoint on the located host. An http server communicates with the client through this endpoint and retrieves the document specified by the remaining component of the name, /welcome.html. The File Transfer Protocol (FTP) service uses similar URLs.

Usenet news articles are named in a similar way. To obtain a news article, the news reader client resolves a domain name to locate a news server. It then communicates with the news server using a well-known endpoint to retrieve a particular article on the news server.

Many internet systems include a process called a "name service" that examines the type of service required by each incoming request and returns a list of addresses of servers that can handle the request. It is the responsibility of the name service to balance the

workload of the system by returning the addresses in such a way that work is spread evenly between the servers.

In a redundant server system, a site has more than one server. These servers collectively serve the entire user population. A problem arises when certain servers are performing more than their share of the workload of incoming user tasks. Some servers are operating at or near their capacity while other servers that could be sharing the workload remain idle. Such a system is said to have an "unbalanced" workload. It is desirable to balance the workload of the servers as much as possible.

In addition, servers go in and out of service. Because any server can serve any user, the workload of a failed server can be assigned to other working servers. A conventional redundant server system effects load balancing using a "round robin" scheme to assign incoming requests to servers. As each request is received, the DNS service assigns a next server of the available servers. A round robin scheme for load balancing is not always satisfactory because the name service does not always have up-to-date information about which servers are actually available. For example, a server may have failed or may have been added to the system without the name service being notified. Conventional name services often rely on a human being to reconfigure the knowledge that the name service has about the system.

A site installs one or more internet servers to gain access to the internet and its services. The primary goal is to enable a site to deploy its internet servers in a highly "scalable" and "reliable" manner. A "scalable deployment" architecture allows the site to support a large number of users and to increase capacity gracefully as the number of users increases. A "reliable" architecture minimizes the impact of component failures. It may mask failures by redistributing the workload of failed components to working components.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention overcomes the problems and disadvantages of the prior art by implementing a self-reconfiguring name service that distributes workload among the available servers in a system. A Service Monitor for each host system of a site periodically broadcasts information about available servers. As new servers are added to the host, they are announced by way of this broadcast message. The broadcast message also indicates the workload of the host.

Each name service has an associated process called a Name Binder Modifier that receives the broadcast messages from the Service Monitors. Periodically, each Name Binder Modifier reviews the information it has received from various Service Monitors. The Name Binder Modifier maintains a list for each service of available servers. For each service, servers executing on a host whose workload exceeds a predetermined work-

load value are deleted from a list of available servers. The list of available servers for each service contains at least a minimum number of servers whenever possible, however.

The Name Binder Modifier periodically updates a plurality of zone files for respective services in accordance with its lists to indicate which servers are available to have work routed to them. The Name Binder Modifier assumes that servers which have not broadcast a message within an update interval are no longer available. The DNS service loads information from the updated zone files for use in its routing scheme.

Each Service Monitor has an associated configuration file specifying, for each service, a time interval after which the Service Monitor should send a broadcast message. Furthermore, each Name Binder Modifier has a configuration file specifying, for each service, a time interval after which the zone files should be updated in accordance with the broadcast messages, a minimum number of servers for the service, and a maximum desirable workload per server.

In accordance with the purpose of the invention, as embodied and broadly described herein, the invention is a method for reconfiguring a load balancing system, comprising the steps, performed by a data processing system, of sending, by a Service Monitor, for a service of the data processing system, a broadcast message containing a workload of a host on which the service is located and a list of addresses of the host; receiving, by a Name Binding Modifier, the broadcast message; and updating, by the Name Binding Modifier, a zone file in accordance with the information in the broadcast message.

Objects and advantages of the invention will be set forth in part in the description which follows and in part will be obvious from the description or may be learned by practice of the invention. The objects and advantages of the invention will be realized and attained by means of the elements and combinations particularly pointed out in the appended claims.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate several embodiments of the invention and, together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a computer system in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 2 shows an example of a host system having a plurality of servers and services.

Fig. 3 is a flow chart of steps performed by a Service Monitor of Fig. 1 to send a broadcast message.

Fig. 4 shows an example of a format of a broadcast message.

Fig. 5 is a flow chart of steps performed by a Name Binding Modifier of Fig. 1 when it receives a broadcast message.

Figs. 6(a) and 6(b) are flow charts of steps performed by the Name Binding Modifier when a timer for a service expires.

Fig. 7 shows an example of a configuration file for a Service Monitor.

Fig. 8 shows an example of a configuration file for a Name Binder Modifier.

Fig. 9 shows an example of a configuration file for a DNS service.

Fig. 10 shows an example of several previous and next lists in the Name Binding Modifier.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Reference will now be made in detail to the preferred embodiments of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. Wherever possible, the same reference numbers will be used throughout the drawings to refer to the same or like parts.

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a computer system in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. A client 130 communicates with server 140 over line 106, which can be, for example, a LAN, a WAN, or an internet connection. Line 106 can also represent a wireless connection, such as a cellular network connection. Server 140 includes a first computer 110 and a second computer 120. First computer 110 and second computer 120 are connected together via line 107.

First computer 110 includes a CPU 102; a memory 104; input/output lines 105; an input device 160, such as a keyboard or mouse; and a display device 150, such as a display terminal. First computer 110 further includes an input device 161 for reading a computer usable medium 162 having computer readable program code means embodied therein. Input device 161 is, for example, a disk drive.

Memory 104 of first computer 110 includes two server processes (also called "daemons"): Domain Name Server (DNS) server 170 and Name Binding Modifier 176. Name Binder Modifier 176 runs on every system that has a DNS server. Name Binder Modifier server 176 has an associated configuration file 178 and one or more associated header files 172 (one per zone file). DNS server 170 has a plurality of zone files 173, 174. Each zone file corresponds to a service available on the system.

A preferred embodiment of the present invention includes a second DNS server (not shown) to provide redundancy. A person of ordinary skill in the art will understand that memory 104 also contains additional information, such as application programs, operating systems, data, etc., which are not shown in the figure for the sake of clarity.

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To determine availability, Service Monitor 180 tests the availability of the service on the local host by attempting to connect to a TCP port of the service, determined in accordance with the configuration file of the service. If the connect fails, then the service is not available. If the connect is successful, then the service is available on the host.

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Modifier 176 searches current list 1004 of the service ID. If the address is not found in the current list in step 510, then a new entry is added to the current list in step 512. The new entry contains the current address and the current workload (from the broadcast message). If the address in the message is found in the current list in step 510, then the workload value from the broadcast message is used to update the found entry in step 514. Thus, the current list for the service ID contains the current workloads and addresses of hosts providing available services. Note that broadcast messages can be received from multiple Service Monitors.

Figs. 6(a) and 6(b) are flow charts of steps performed by Name Binding Modifier 176 of Fig. 1. Initially, Name Binding Modifier 176 initializes respective system timers for each service (not shown). When one of the timers times out in step 602, Name Binding Modifier 176 locates the current and previous lists for the service in step 604. In step 606, the current list is sorted by load. In step 608, Name Binding Modifier 176 counts the number of entries in the current list (N_{bli}) that contain workload values below a desired load index. The desired load index is determined in accordance with the configuration file of Fig. 8. In step 610, if N_{bli} is greater than the minimum number of entries in the current list, then there are more than enough entries in the list that contain load values less than the load index and, in step 612, the current list is pruned of entries having a workload value above the workload index (i.e., so that N_{bli} entries remain). If not, in step 614, the current list is pruned so that the minimum number of entries remain. After steps 612 and 614, control passes to Fig. 6(b).

In step 620 of Fig. 6(b), the host addresses of the current and previous lists for the service are compared. If the two lists are not the same, then it is necessary to modify the zone files in step 624. Step 624 creates a temporary output file. Header file 172 is copied to the output file. Next, the address records for the addresses in the current list are written to the output file. Lastly, Name Binder Modifier 176 signals DNS server 170 to reload a zone file for the service from the output file. DNS server 170 will now have up-to-date information on the state of the system. In step 626, the current list for the service ID becomes the previous list and the current list is made empty.

If, for example, there are four available news servers (one host address each) and the maximum load for each service is 60%, the minimum number of servers for each service is two, and the services are advertising the following loads:

```
10%: news1
65%: news2
70%: news3
80%: news4
```

Only entries for news3 and news4 are removed from the current list. Even though the host of news2 has a work-

load value greater than 60%, removing news2 from the list would leave less than two entries in the list, so news2 is not removed. For a given service, proper operation requires that the update interval used by Service Monitor 180 be of much shorter duration (half or less) than the update interval used by Name Binder Modifier 176. Otherwise, it would be possible that not all available services would send a broadcast message during each update interval of Name Binder Modifier 176.

Fig. 7 shows an example of a configuration file 182 for Service Monitor 180. The configuration file includes three types of statements: "service" statements, "sample" load statements, and "exclude" statements. A "service" statement 702, which specifies the service available at a site, includes the term "service" followed by three arguments. A first argument (e.g., "60") is the update interval for the service (also called the "refresh interval") or the "heartbeat interval.") in a time unit such as seconds. The update interval is specified in time units, such as seconds. For example, in Fig. 7, the duration of the http timer is 60 seconds and the duration of the news timer is 120 seconds.

A second argument (e.g., "http") is the name of a service. A third argument (e.g., "80") is a communications endpoint used to verify the availability of the service on a host. In the described embodiment, this communication endpoint is a TCP port number.

When a service is initialized, Service Monitor 180 obtains an update interval for the service from the configuration file. A broadcast message is sent by the service at the expiration of each update interval if it is determined that the service is available on the host. At initialization, the service also obtains the communications endpoint for the service in accordance with the configuration file.

Thus, the example configuration file of Fig. 7 corresponds to the servers of Fig. 2. In the configuration file, the update interval for the service http is 60 time units (e.g., 60 seconds) and the update interval for the service news is 120 time units (e.g., 120 seconds). The http service uses port 80 and the news service uses port 119.

A "sample" load statement 704 specifies how frequently the load on a host should be measured. In this example, the sampling interval is 120 seconds. In the current implementation, only CPU utilization is measured. Various implementations may use any various known methods of measuring load. In one implementation, the configuration file contains the name of a routine to be used to measure load.

An "exclude" statement eliminates certain host addresses and subnets from being advertised. This exclusion reduces the number of broadcast messages if certain addresses should not participate in providing services.

Other implementations may provide support for UDP based services and more sophisticated per service liveness test and load measurements. Service

Monitor 180 can query the host operating system kernel to determine if there is any process listening on a specified UDP port. More sophisticated per service load measurement may be accomplished through loadable modules that are service specific. For example, an http modules may retrieve a document from the http server to test for liveliness, and use the response time as an indication of load on the http server. Value added http servers may also provide its measured average response time to the http module.

Fig. 8 shows an example of a configuration file for Name Binder Modifier 176. The operation of Name Binder Modifier 176 is controlled by dns-update statements. One "dns-update" statement 802 occurs for each service. The statement includes the term "dns-update" followed by six arguments. A first argument (e.g., "120") is the update interval (also called the "refresh interval") for a service. It determines how frequently bindings associated with a service/zone are updated. A second argument (e.g., "http") is the name of the service. Third and fourth arguments are the names of the header and output files for the service. A fifth argument is the minimum number of addresses that should be in the zone when possible. A sixth argument is the desired maximum load index for the service.

Fig. 9 shows an example of a configuration file for DNS service 170. For each zone, the configuration file specifies a method to be used for load-balancing within the zone. Thus, DNS service 170 may use different methods, such as round robin, etc. to load balance within different zones. The first field of the configuration file holds the domain name of the zone. The second field of the configuration file holds a file name of a file containing descriptions/information on the zone.

In summary, the load distributing DNS server provides finer grain load distribution during each name resolution, while the Name Binding Modifier provides coarse grain load balancing based on load information provided by the Service Monitor. In addition, broadcast messages by the Service Monitor advertises available servers. The Name Binding Modifier depends on these broadcast messages to add and remove host addresses to zones to reflect new servers, as well as failed servers.

Together the load distributing DNS server, the Service Monitor, and the Name Binding Modifier provide scalability and reliability for TCP based services on redundant servers. Multiple servers provide scalability, and reconfiguration around failed servers provide reliability.

Other embodiments will be apparent to those skilled in the art from consideration of the specification and practice of the invention disclosed herein. It is intended that the specification and examples be considered as exemplary only, with a true scope of the invention being indicated by the following claims.

Claims

1. A method for reconfiguring a load balancing system, comprising the steps, performed by a data processing system, of:

sending, by a Service Monitor, for a service of the data processing system, a broadcast message containing a workload of a host on which the service is located and a list of addresses of the host;

receiving, by a Name Binding Modifier, the broadcast message; and

updating, by the Name Binding Modifier, a zone file corresponding to the service in accordance with the information in the broadcast message.

2. The method of claim 1, further including the step of performing a load balancing operation in accordance with the updated zone file.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the load balancing operation is a round robin load balancing operation.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the round robin load balancing operation is performed in accordance with a value in the zone file indicating a type of load balancing operation.

5. The method of claim 1, further including a plurality of zone files, each corresponding to one of a plurality of services.

6. The method of claim 1,

further including the step of setting, by the Service Monitor, a timer for the service, and wherein the sending step is performed when the timer times out.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the step of setting the timer is performed in accordance with a configuration file for the Service Monitor.

8. The method of claim 1,

further including the step of setting, by the Name Binding Modifier, a timer for the service, and

wherein the updating step is performed when the timer times out.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the step of setting the timer is performed in accordance with a configuration file for the Name Binder Modifier.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the sending step includes the steps of:

determining if the service is available; and
if the service is available, adding to the broadcast message the addresses that can provide the service.

a timer setting portion configured to set a timer for the service; and
a portion configured to send the broadcast message when the timer times out.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the updating step includes the steps of:
finding a current list for the service;
determining whether each address in the list of addresses is in the current list; and
adding the address to the current list in accordance with the determining step.
12. The method of claim 11,
further including the step of comparing the current list to a previous list, and,
wherein the updating step is performed when the current and previous lists are not the same.
13. An apparatus in a reconfiguring a load balancing system, comprising:
a Service Monitor configured to send, for a service in a data processing system, a broadcast message containing a workload of a host on which the service is located and a list of addresses of the host;
a Name Binding Modifier configured to receive the broadcast message; and
an updating portion configured to update a zone file corresponding to the service in accordance with the information in the broadcast message.
14. The apparatus of claim 13, further including a Domain Name Service configured to perform a load balancing operation in accordance with the updated zone file.
15. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the Domain Name Service performs a round robin load balancing operation.
16. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the Domain Name Service performs the round robin load balancing operation in accordance with a value in the zone file indicating a type of load balancing operation.
17. The apparatus of claim 13, further including a plurality of zone files, each corresponding to one of a plurality of services.
18. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the Service Monitor includes:
a timer setting portion configured to set a timer for the service; and
a portion configured to send the broadcast message when the timer times out.
19. The apparatus of claim 18, wherein the timer setting portion sets the timer in accordance with a configuration file for the Service Monitor.
20. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the Name Binding Modifier includes:
a timer setting portion configured to set a timer for the service; and
a portion configured to update the zone file when the timer times out.
21. The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the timer setting portion sets the timer in accordance with a configuration file for the Name Binding Modifier.
22. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the Service Monitor includes:
a portion configured to determine whether the service is available; and
a portion configured to add to the broadcast message, if the service is available, the addresses that can provide the service.
23. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the Name Binding Modifier includes:
a portion configured to find a current list for the service;
a portion configured to determine whether each address in the list of addresses is in the current list; and
a portion configured to add the address to the current list in accordance with the determining portion.
24. The method of claim 23, further including a portion configured to compare the current list to a previous list, and
wherein the updating portion includes a portion that updates the zone file when the current and previous lists are not the same.
25. A computer program product, comprising:
a computer usable medium having computer readable code embodied therein for reconfiguring a load balancing system, the computer program product comprising:
computer readable program code devices configured to cause a computer to effect sending, for a service of the data processing system, a

broadcast message containing a workload of a host on which the service is located and a list of addresses of the host;

computer readable program code devices configured to cause a computer to effect receiving the broadcast message; and

computer readable program code devices configured to cause a computer to effect updating a zone file corresponding to the service in accordance with the information in the broadcast message.

26. A method for reconfiguring a load balancing system, comprising the steps, performed by a Service Monitor in a data processing system, of:

setting a timer for the service of the data processing system, in accordance with a configuration file for the Service Monitor; and sending, for the service, a broadcast message containing a workload of a host on which the service is located and a list of addresses of the host, the broadcast message being usable to update a record of a current status of the data processing system.

27. The method of claim 26, wherein the sending step includes the steps of:

determining if the service is available; and if the service is available, adding to the broadcast message the addresses that can provide the service.

28. A method for reconfiguring a load balancing system, comprising the steps, performed by a Name Binder Modifier of a data processing system, of:

receiving a broadcast message containing a workload of a host on which a service is located and a list of addresses of the host; setting a timer for the service; and updating a zone file corresponding to the service, when the timer times out, in accordance with the information in the broadcast message.

29. The method of claim 28, further including the step of performing a load balancing operation in accordance with the updated zone file.

30. The method of claim 29, wherein the step of setting the timer is performed in accordance with a configuration file for the Name Binder Modifier.

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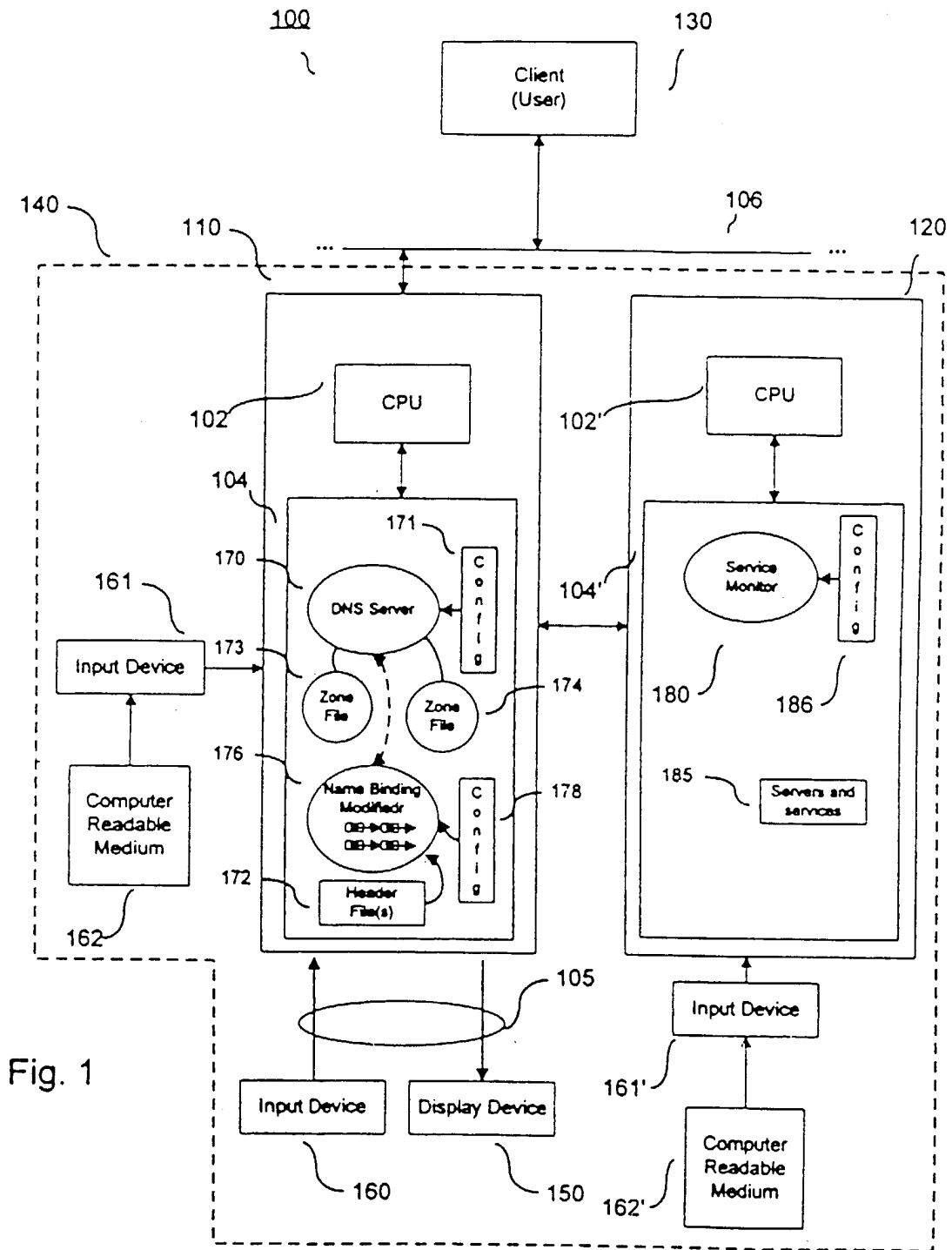


Fig. 1

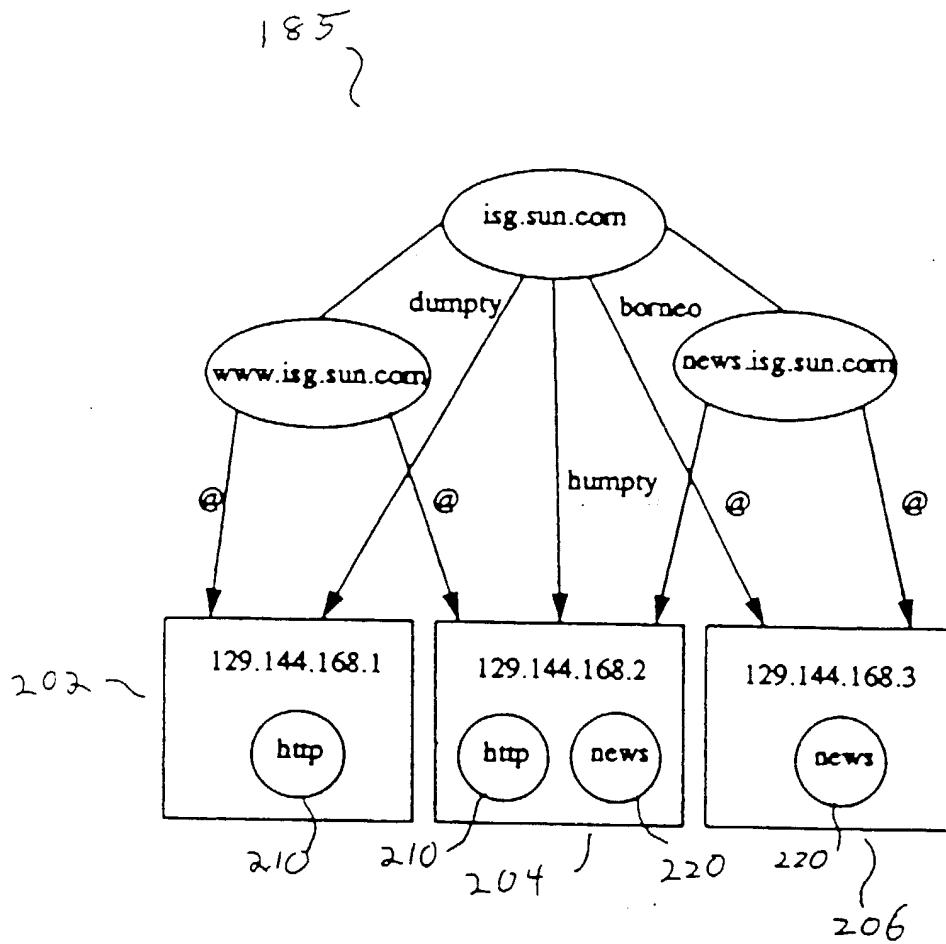
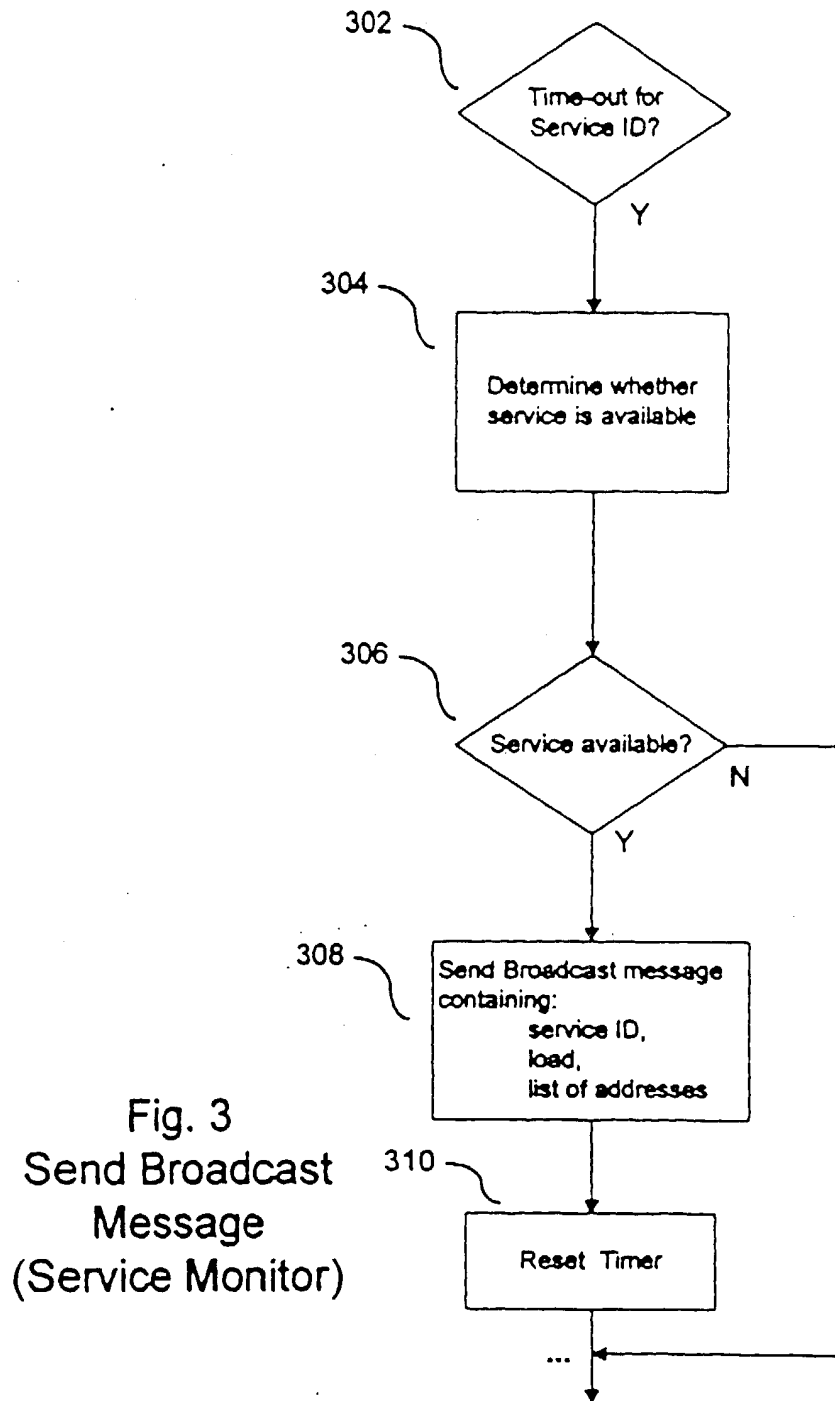


Fig. 2



Service ID
Host Workload
List of Host Addresses (Excluding those in Exclude Statement)

Fig. 4

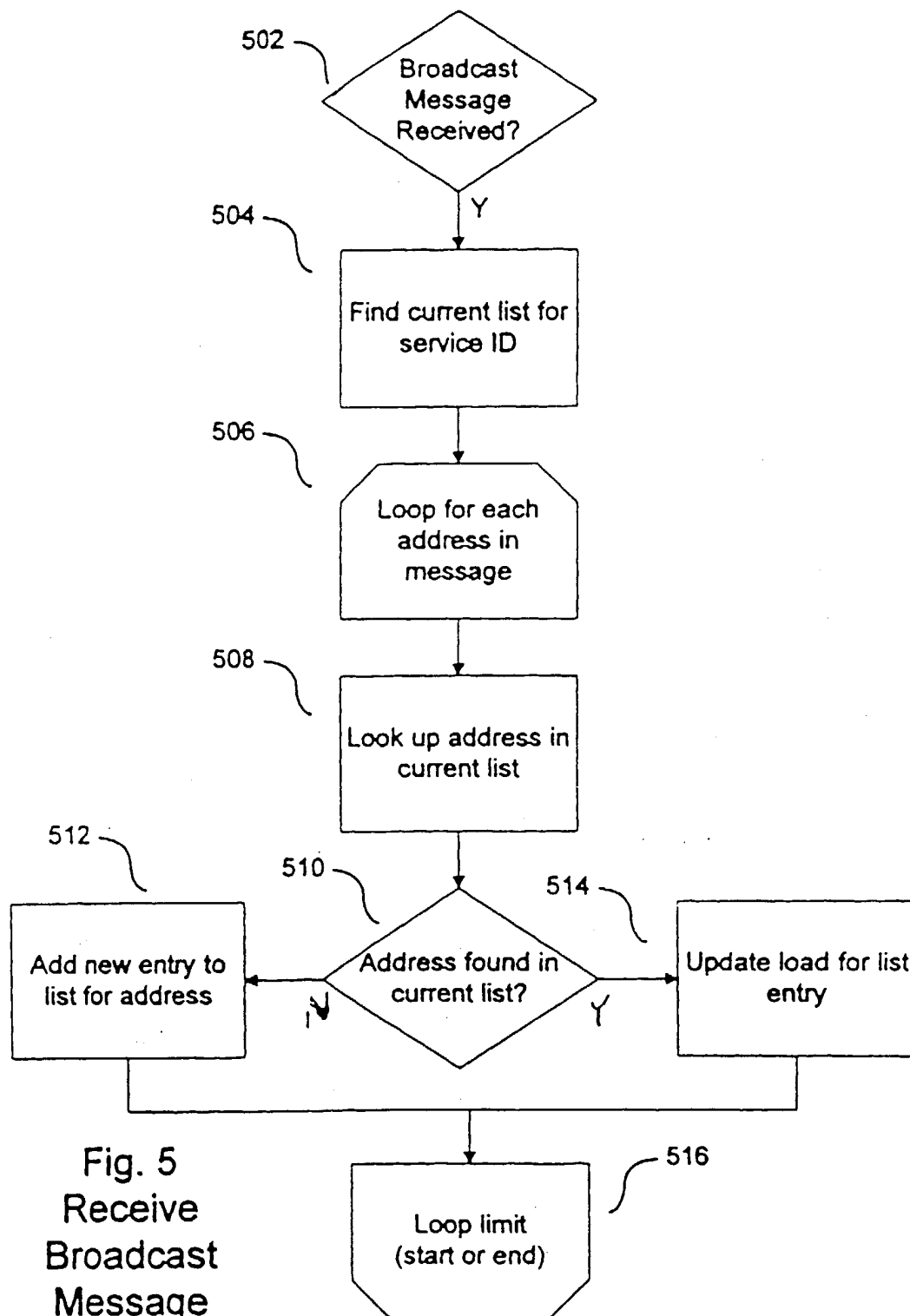
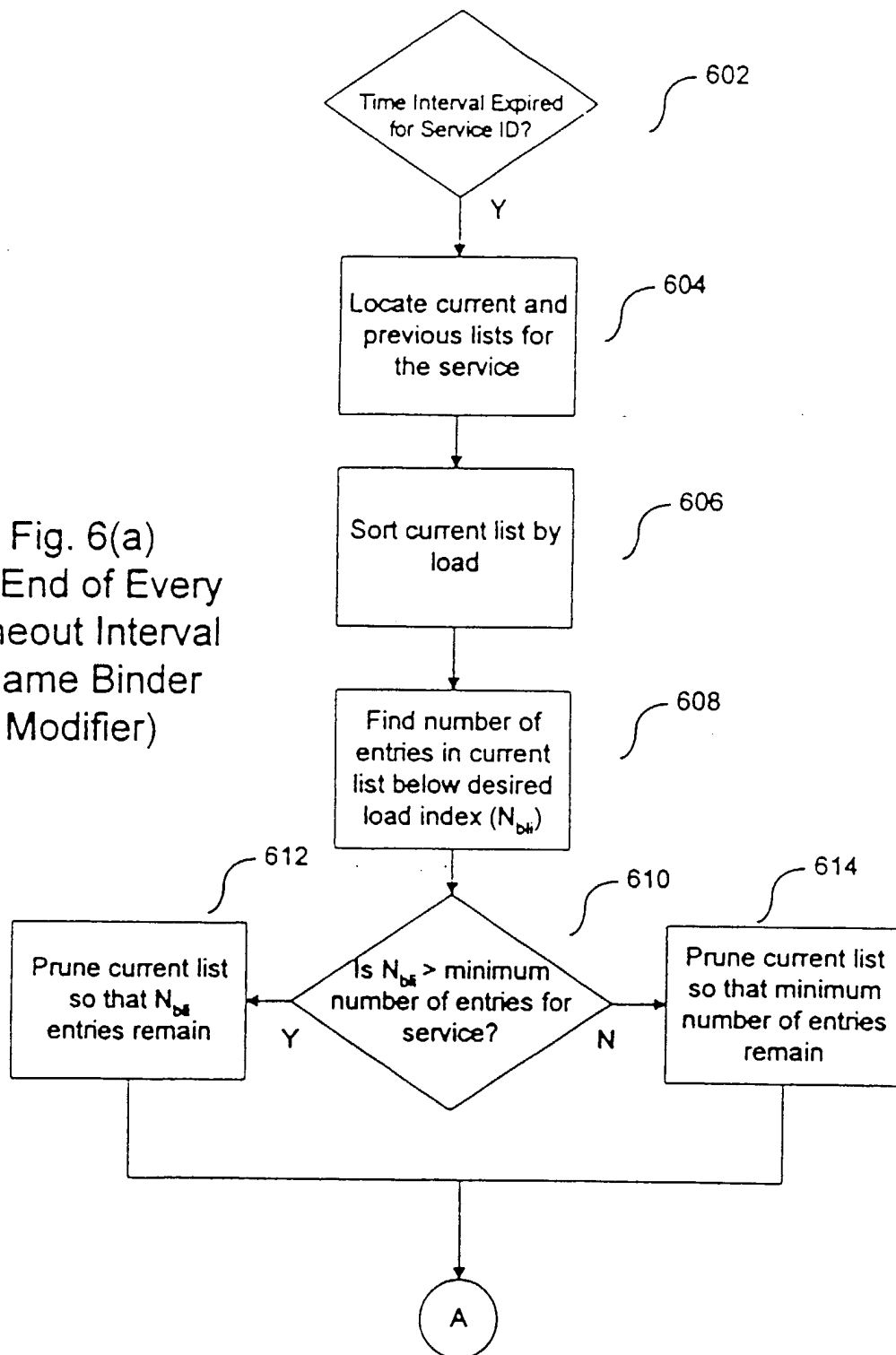


Fig. 5
Receive
Broadcast
Message
(Name Binder
Modifier)

Fig. 6(a)
At End of Every
Timeout Interval
(Name Binder
Modifier)



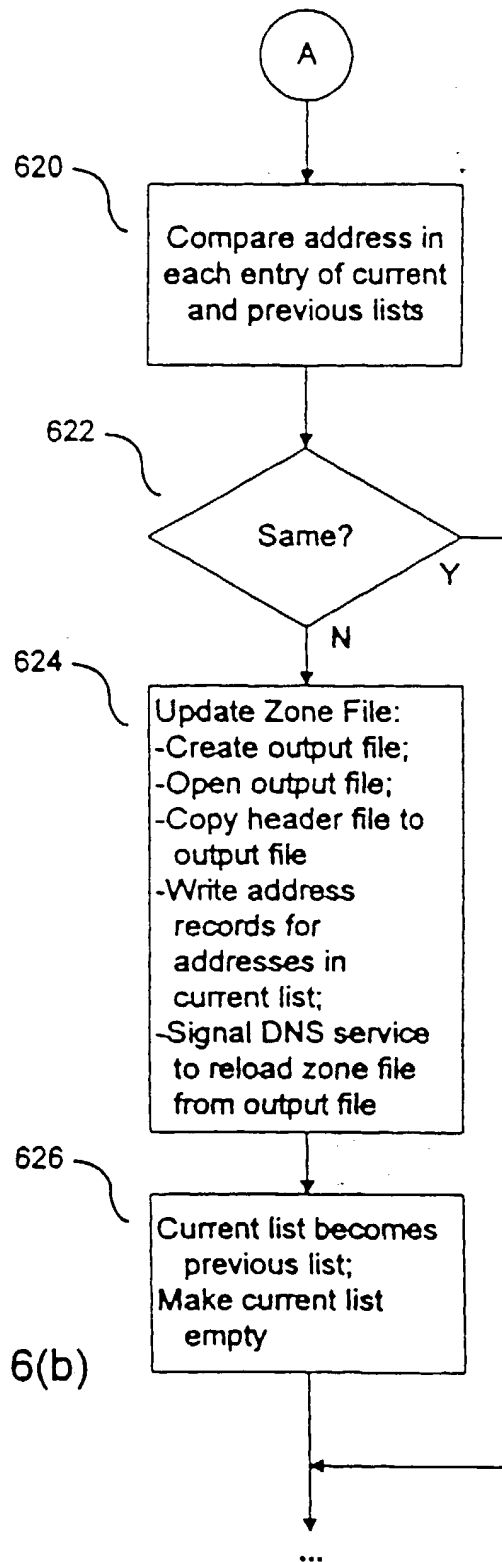


Fig. 6(b)

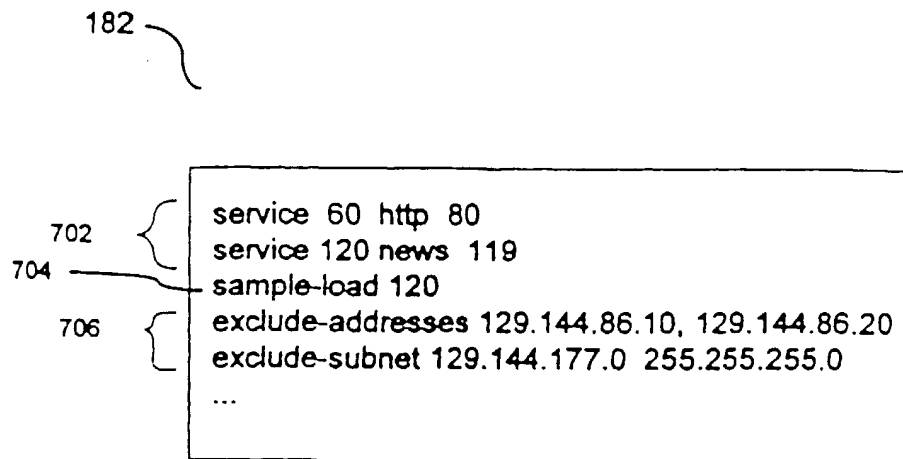


Fig. 7
Config. File for
Service Monitor

```
dns-update 120 http www.isg.sun.com.header www.isg.sun.com.cache 1 60  
dns-update 240 news news.isg.sun.com.header news.isg.sun.com.cache 2 60
```

Fig. 8
Config File for Name Binding
Modifier

Domain name of zone	File containing zone info	Balancing scheme
a.sun.com	/etc/a.data	RR
		other
		RR

Fig. 9
Config File for DNS Server
Zone Files

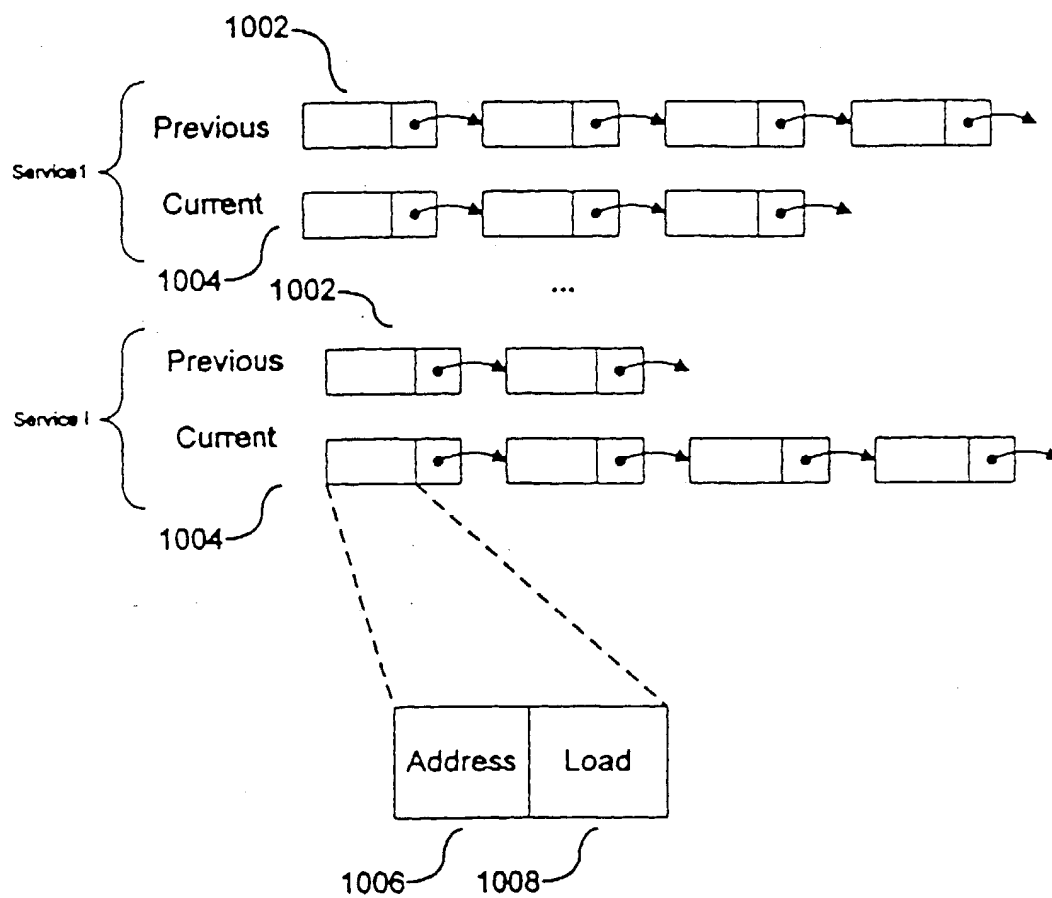


Fig. 10

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